

STATEMENT OF THERA BRADSHAW
President
Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Intl.
before the
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Subcommittee on Communications

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am especially grateful to Chairman Burns, Senator Hollings and Senator Inouye for your leadership in drawing much-needed attention to the E-911 issue.

I am Thera Bradshaw, President of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International, known as APCO. I am also Assistant General Manager, Policy and Public Services, for the City of Los Angeles Information Technology Agency. My career has been dedicated to building emergency communications systems in a variety of venues up and down the west coast, from rural Washington and Oregon to urban areas such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. In addition to being a long-standing member of APCO, I served as President of the National Emergency Number Association in 1994-95 and was a co-signer of a 1996 consensus document within the public safety community that led to the FCC rule on E-911 deployment.

APCO is the oldest and largest not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to public safety communications. Our members are truly the *first* of the first responders in an emergency. We are the first voice people hear when they call 911 for help – and we

put the emergency response in motion. In addition to getting as much information from the caller as possible, our members identify the location of the emergency, dispatch help to that location, and provide the means for the responders to communicate with each other on the scene. APCO is the face of 911, and we have nearly 16,000 members in the U.S. and around the world.

Mr. Chairman, you and your colleagues are well aware that public safety and emergency communications capabilities are critical in our increasingly wireless world. Virtually everyday, we hear of yet another life being lost or put at greater risk because the location of a 911 call from a wireless phone could not be identified. As you know, E-911 technology provides the communications infrastructure to locate these calls.

We *need* this technology deployed as broadly and as quickly as possible. E-911 is a critical component of our public safety net when we are faced with fire, crimes in progress, medical emergencies, traffic accidents, and hundreds of other possible scenarios requiring an immediate emergency response. Unfortunately, in the post-September 11 world, these potential emergencies also include terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

Full and effective deployment of E-911 is a multi-faceted undertaking, but today I want to focus your attention on one primary concern: the readiness of our 911 Centers. In the communications world, these centers are known as public safety answering points or PSAPs, and I will use that terminology here. I also want to briefly address the issues of

spectrum availability and interoperability, which are critical to the overall communications needs of our nation's public safety personnel.

At the heart of PSAP readiness are two primary issues: PSAPs must be adequately funded, and PSAP personnel must be appropriately trained.

Let me first address the matter of PSAP funding. In terms of any Federal appropriations for homeland security or emergency preparedness, I strongly urge Congress to recognize the essential role of emergency communications in protecting our citizens and our homeland. As the nation's *first* first responders, APCO and its members ask that you clearly define the term "first responder" and that emergency communications professionals be included in this definition.

I would also like to address the current controversy regarding state funding. As you know, nearly 40 states have implemented a surcharge on cell phone customers to build a fund dedicated to deploying E-911. Given that most states and cities are currently facing severe budget deficits, this funding is crucial to PSAP readiness. These dollars are required for PSAPs to receive and process location information essential to identifying and locating wireless calls to 911. However, because not all states have enabling legislation that clearly specifies how these funds can be expended, a significant number of states have already diverted a total of nearly \$500 million from these funds and used it for other expenses.

In my home state of California, a proposal was introduced last month to transfer \$51 million from the State Emergency Telephone Number Account to pay for non-911 operations. This follows on the heels of a similar transfer of \$50 million last year. According to the Comptroller for the State of New York, \$162 million was shifted from their E-911 fund and used to pay for non-911 expenses. In a cruel juxtaposition, this news was discovered subsequent to learning of the tragic drowning of four high school boys in Long Island Sound. The boys made a cell phone call to 911 as their rowboat was sinking, but they could not be located because E-911 technology was not in place. I cannot emphasize this enough – these are *life* and *death* issues we are dealing with. By diverting funds intended for E-911 deployment, we prolong the implementation of this life-saving technology that many of our citizens, sometimes to great despair, assume is already in place.

On a positive note, I am proud to say that APCO is stepping up to help with PSAP funding. Last year APCO created the Public Safety Foundation of America (PSFA), a public-private partnership dedicated to saving lives by supporting and expediting the nationwide deployment of E-911. Funding for the PSFA is provided by a variety of sources, including donations from corporations, APCO chapters, and other organizations.

Two weeks ago, the PSFA announced its inaugural round of grants, awarding nearly \$2.4 million to 29 grantees in 20 states. Three more grant cycles are scheduled for this year. Recently, several of your Senate colleagues joined us in announcing the grant awards in their home states. I would like to thank Chairman Burns and Senator Dorgan for

honoring the PSFA and its grantees by participating in grant announcements on February 20 in Montana and North Dakota, respectively. Although we realize these grants constitute just a small fraction of the total dollars needed to assure PSAP readiness, we at APCO and its foundation wanted to provide tangible support as well as technical advice toward the E-911 effort.

I am proud to say the PSFA is the *only* public safety communications organization to provide direct financial support to state and local public safety organizations. The PSFA is guided by a coalition of organizations with a shared commitment to public safety, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police; the International Association of Fire Chiefs; the National Association of Counties; the National Association of State EMS Directors; the National Emergency Number Association; the National Governors Association; and the National League of Cities.

The second issue critical to PSAP readiness is ensuring that our public safety communications personnel are adequately trained. Because the technology used by the PSAPs is constantly evolving and improving, training presents an ongoing challenge and expense to the PSAPs. This will be especially true in the next few years as the nation's wireless carriers introduce new technologies to meet the FCC rule of nationwide E-911 deployment by the close of 2005.

APCO has long been aware of the importance of training and, in 1988, established a nonprofit institute to provide affordable training and certification for fire, police and EMS dispatch professionals. The APCO Institute trains 10,000 individuals per year and

remains the only not-for-profit educational institute that serves the needs of the public safety communications community. Still, funding for continuous training remains a challenge to most PSAPs.

APCO strongly believes that Federal funds should be made available for training of public safety communications personnel as a means of bolstering homeland security and general emergency preparedness. With the continuing threat of terrorist attacks involving the possible use of chemical or biological weapons, public safety in even the smallest communities has now become a *national* concern. Moreover, Federal assistance is especially important now to help mitigate any cutbacks in funding by state and local governments due to budget shortfalls.

In addition to PSAP readiness, I would also like to address briefly the need for additional spectrum and improved interoperability, two issues that are critically linked.

The lack of sufficient spectrum for public safety communications has led to dangerous congestion on existing channels. Homeland security efforts have increased the need for public safety communications capacity and capability, placing even greater demands on scarce public safety spectrum allocations. As a result, the ability of our public safety agencies to communicate with each other in emergency situations is severely limited.

As you are aware, resolution of the spectrum issue has been pending for many years now. In 1996, the joint FCC/NTIA Public Safety Wireless Advisory Committee recommended

that approximately 24 MHz of spectrum be allocated for public safety use within five years. In 1997, Congress mandated that the FCC so allocate this spectrum. Although the FCC did reallocate the spectrum from TV channels 63, 64, 68 and 69 for public safety, Congress' 1997 mandate permitted these television stations to remain on the air through 2006 – or until 85 percent of households in the relevant market have the ability to receive DTV signals, whichever is later. At this stage, it is highly unlikely that this 85 percent benchmark will be met until long after 2006 and probably not until well into the next decade. As a result, police, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety personnel must wait indefinitely for the additional radio spectrum and communications capabilities that, frankly, they needed yesterday. Therefore, we continue to urge that Congress revise existing law and establish December 31, 2006, as a firm date for the nationwide availability of this radio spectrum for public safety communications.

The lack of spectrum also has direct and significant impact on interoperability. Because of non-interoperable radio systems, public safety personnel frequently are unable to communicate with other responders in an emergency. In the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, emergency response personnel attempting to coordinate life-saving activities had to rely on hand signals and “runners” because their radios lacked effective interoperability. To varying degrees, similar difficulties were experienced on September 11 at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. Emergency crews coming into New York from the surrounding areas found they could not communicate with emergency personnel already on the scene because of non-interoperable systems. New allocation of spectrum would allow agencies in the same geographic areas to utilize

common or compatible radio frequency bands, permitting a more coordinated and therefore more effective emergency response.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join in this important dialogue on E-911 and related public safety communications issues. Once again, I commend Chairman Burns, Senator Hollings, Senator Inouye, and the Members of the Committee for raising the profile of these very important issues. APCO and its membership stand ready to work with Congress and all other stakeholders to address the challenges before us.